



*"Committed to the protection and promotion of public health."*

## Gallatin City-County Health Department

For more information, contact:  
Health Department at 582-3100

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### Chickenpox

The Gallatin City-County Health Department has been made aware of 15-20 cases of chickenpox among school-aged children within the community. Incidences have occurred so far at Whittier and Chief Joseph Schools. Although this is usually not a serious illness, it often causes children to miss days at school/childcare while they have the rash, and parents may miss work to stay at home with their ill child. In some children and adults, chickenpox may cause more serious illness, leading to a stay in the hospital or even death.

Chickenpox is spread from person to person by direct contact, droplet or airborne spread of fluid from the lesions, or secretions from the respiratory tract, i.e., saliva or mucus membranes. The incubation period (the time from exposure to the time of illness), is 2-3 weeks, but commonly 14-16 days. The period that the patient is contagious is as **long as 5 days, but usually 1-2 days BEFORE** the onset of the rash and continues until the lesions or "pox" are crusted and dry (**usually about 5 days AFTER the onset of rash**).

Vaccination against chickenpox can prevent the disease and is safe and effective for children who are 12 months of age and older. The vaccine is recommended by pediatricians and the Centers for Disease Control for all children who have never had chickenpox and it is now part of the routine vaccination schedule. Children who have never had chickenpox should get 2 doses at the following ages:

#### **General Recommendation:**

- 1<sup>st</sup> dose: 12-15 months of age
- 2<sup>nd</sup> dose: 4-6 years of age (may be given earlier, if at least 3 months after the 1<sup>st</sup> dose)

#### **Special Circumstances:**

Anyone who is not fully immunized (with 2 doses of vaccine), and has never had chickenpox, should receive one or two doses of chickenpox vaccine. The timing of these doses depends on the person's age. Ask your provider what is appropriate for you and your child. Chickenpox vaccine may be given at the same time as other vaccines. The vaccine, if given 3-5 days after exposure to the disease, can either help to prevent illness or reduce the severity of the disease.

There are a few individuals for whom chickenpox is potentially very serious and even life threatening. These are persons with weakened immune systems and pregnant women who have never had chickenpox or been vaccinated. A medication is available that can protect these persons. Contact your medical care provider if you or anyone you know with these conditions has been exposed to chickenpox.

If your child does develop chickenpox, he or she should be kept at home until the rash has crusted over.

If you have any questions, please contact the Gallatin City County Health Department at 582-3100 or for more information, visit the department's website at [www.gallatin.mt.gov/health](http://www.gallatin.mt.gov/health) and select 'Public Health Information' under "Additional Links".